

## Going it alone in court

BY JULIE MACFARLANE

As the number of people going to court alone without a lawyer continues to rise – reaching 80% in some family courts – the crisis in Access to Justice in Ontario continues to grow.

Research (in Canada, but also now in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand) shows that applicants can't afford counsel. Some people may begin with a lawyer by their side, but quickly run out of funds when most lawyers charge \$300 an hour and up.

The National Self-Represented Litigants Project or NSRLP, is continuing to raise awareness about the Access to Justice crisis, both among the public and inside the legal establishment. Working with these mandates of research, resource development and dialogue, NSRLP brings the plight of self-represented litigants – facing the life crisis that brought them to the courts in the first place, whether this is an ugly divorce, or perhaps a wrongful dismissal claim – to the forefront of national and local media.

CBC's The National carried a documentary titled "The New Litigants" created by a CBC producer with the help of NSRLP to highlight the personal experi-



ences of those whose lives are affected by lack of legal representation.

NSRLP continues to produce resources designed specifically to help self-represented individuals navigate through the complex and arcane court system.

The NSRLP Annual Report for 2015 demonstrates the growth of organization – almost 3,000 direct social media followers and last year website was visited almost 30,000 times.

In the coming year, NSRLP will continue to work on promoting new and more affordable models of legal services, such as unbundled and fixed-fee services.

In addition we shall mount a new program by Legal Aid Ontario which includes more resources for duty counsel in courthouses, legal advice for parties who choose to use mediation to try to settle disputes, and some targeted funding for cases involving domestic violence.

Please contact us if you are a self-represented litigant and have a story to tell. Go to our website at [www.representingyourselfcanada.com](http://www.representingyourselfcanada.com)

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## Quitting the sex trade

### IS AN EMPOWERMENT CENTRE THE ANSWER?

Almost a year ago, some former sex trade workers approached Peel Poverty Action Group (PPAG) to discuss temporary and permanent affordable housing for themselves and colleagues still on the streets. They pointed out that shelters for women in Peel Region are primarily for women (and their dependent children) who have been abused by their partners. No social housing or shelter space is assigned for women in the sex trade who want to get out of the "business" and need a place to live while getting their lives in order and finding permanent affordable housing.

PPAG and the women have set up a Working Group to explore the idea of a Women's Empowerment Centre – something of a mix between a drop-in centre and temporary housing with support services.

A list has been made of issues and priorities, along with a process for getting started. Some women sex trade workers and women addicted to drugs and alcohol have joined the Working Group.

Janet Menard, Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services in Ontario,

attended a recent PPAG meeting and suggested a community hub, using existing services and organizations to provide immediate temporary housing and support services for vulnerable women, with permanent and affordable housing to follow.

The hub would focus on female current and former sex trade workers, women coming out of prison, women addicted to drugs and alcohol, etc. One of the main services of the hub would be a Women's Empowerment Centre where women could "drop-in" to get the help they need, including access to temporary housing leading to affordable permanent housing.

PPAG, the working group, and Peel's Multi Issue-Agency Group (MIAG), are seeking money for a study to find out if a Women's Empowerment Centre within a hub is feasible.

For more information, phone KellyAnn Williams at 416 660-8004 or email [kellyannwilliams@gmail.com](mailto:kellyannwilliams@gmail.com) or phone Sandra DeCotto at 647 701-6902 or email [decotto.sandra@gmail.com](mailto:decotto.sandra@gmail.com)

## ATTAWAPISKAT: A distant battle won

### HOW PEEL TEENS HELPED JAMES BAY CHILDREN COMPEL A GOVERNMENT

*The plight of Canada's native peoples is in the news – denunciation of residential schools, suicide among young people, deaths and disappearances of possibly thousands of native women, lack of education, lack of opportunity – and suddenly, after years of government inaction, a possibility that something will be done.*

Back in 2008, something was done: youngsters at Brampton schools St. Edmund Campion and Notre Dame organized petitions and letter-writing campaigns to help Attawapiskat, a community on the shores of James Bay, where Cree children studied in portables which stank of diesel fuel.

Some of Peel's students went to Ottawa, joining Attawapiskat children in a visit to Chuck Strahl, Conservative Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs from 2007 to 2010 and the third minister to deny funding for a new school on the reserve.

This is an excerpt about that visit, from Children of the Broken Treaty, a book by Christie Angus, New Democrat MP for Timmins-James Bay.

The plan was for the youth to speak to Strahl about the conditions that they faced, and then Grand Chief Stan Louttit would lay out options for getting the school project back on track. These options included putting the school back on the capital planning list or asking Strahl to commit to a tuition arrangement so that the community could get a bank loan and build the school itself.

Louttit had enormous respect in the communities of James Bay as a negotiator for their rights.

He was deeply involved in the Attawapiskat School campaign. Prior to the meeting, Grand Chief Louttit spoke with the three youth to prepare them for what was to come. "Speak from the heart,



Attawapiskat student leader Shannen Kootachen spoke up and at 16 when she told Conservative Minister Chuck Strahl that native children would not abandon their campaign for a new school on their reserve, no matter what the government said. Sadly, Shannen died in a car accident at age 15. (Photo supplied)

and speak the truth, and you will be fine," he said to them.

The delegation was then ushered into a large, plush room with rich console moldings. To break the ice, Strahl pointed to the surroundings and asked them, "What do you think of my office?" Native student leader Shannen Kootachen didn't miss a beat. "I told him I wished I had a classroom that was as nice as his office that he met in every day."

As they sat down, Strahl pre-empted the discussion by telling them matter-of-factly that the school wouldn't be built. It simply wasn't on the government's list of priorities. The delegation was stunned. What was the purpose of the meeting if the government refused to discuss options for addressing the educational needs of Attawapiskat students?

"We invite you to come to our community to understand our living situation," Chris Kiatagiguit offered.

But the answer was no. The elders began to cry. Shannen didn't want to cry in front of the government, so she turned out of the meeting. Stan Louttit

went out into the hall to find her. "This is not how the meeting ends," he told her comfortingly. "You need to go back in there and be a leader." Shannen wasn't just sad but also furious. Nonetheless, she listened to him.

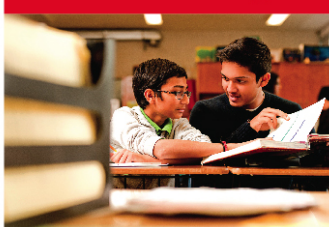
As she stepped back into the room, Strahl was telling the delegation that the meeting was over because he had to attend to other issues. Shannen stepped forward to shake his hand. And this is how the later retold the story to media and supporters:

He told me he couldn't stay for more of the meeting because he had other things to do. We were very upset. The elders who were with us had tears in their eyes. . . . But when he was about to leave, I looked at him straight in the eye and said, "Oh, we're not going to quit, we're not going to give up!"

A new school for 540 students opened at Attawapiskat in August, 2014.



Behind every changed life is someone who made it happen.



You can be that someone.  
Get involved at [unitedwaypeel.org](http://unitedwaypeel.org)



Together, we are possibility.



Students at Peel's Notre Dame school wrote letters, circulated a petition, as did students at St. Edmund Campion, demanding that a school be built in Attawapiskat. If you are in this photo and have a story to tell about your interest in native peoples issues, email [toughimestablood@gmail.com](mailto:toughimestablood@gmail.com)

Photo by Bob McCloskey